

“ To Every Man a Damsel or Two ”

By C. S.

HE wandered up the carpeted steps, rather afraid all the while of the two tall men in uniform who opened the great doors wide to let him into the soft warm light and babble of voices within. At the top he paused, and slowly unbuttoned his overcoat, not knowing which way to turn ; but the crowd swept him up, and carried him round, until he found himself leaning against a padded wall of plush, looking over a sea of heads at the stage far beneath. He turned round, and stood watching the happy crowd, which laughed, and talked, and nodded ceaselessly to itself. Near him, on a sofa, with a table before her, was a woman spreading herself out like some great beautiful butterfly on a bed of velvet pansies. He stood admiring her half unconsciously for some time, and at last, remembering that he was tired and sleepy, and seeing that there was still plenty of room, he threaded his way across and sat down.

The butterfly began tossing a wonderful little brown satin shoe, and tapping it against the leg of the table. Then the parasol slipped across him, and fell to the ground. He hastened to pick it up, lifting his hat as he did so. She seemed surprised, and glancing at a man leaning against the wall, caught his eye, and they both laughed. He blushed a good deal, and wondered what
he

he had done wrong. She spread herself out still further in his direction, and cast side glances at him from under her Gainsborough.

"What were you laughing at just now?" he said impulsively.

"My dear boy, when?"

"With that man."

"Which man?"

"It doesn't matter," he said, blushing again.

She looked up, and winked at the man leaning against the wall.

"Have I offended you by speaking to you?" he said, looking with much concern into her eyes.

She put a little scented net of a handkerchief up to her mouth, and went into uncontrollable fits of laughter.

"What a funny boy you are!" she gasped. "Do do it again."

He looked at her in amazement, and moved a little further away.

"I'm going to tell the waiter to bring me a port—after that last bit of business."

"I don't understand all this," he said desperately: "I wish I had never spoken to you; I wish I had never come in here at all."

"You're very rude all of a sudden. Now don't be troublesome and say you're too broke to pay for drinks," she added as the waiter put the port down with great deliberation opposite her, and held out the empty tray respectfully to him. He stared.

"Why don't you pay, you cuckoo?"

Mechanically he put down a florin, and the waiter counted out the change.

There was a pause. She fingered the stem of her wine-glass, taking little sips, and watching him all the while.

"How

"How often have you been here before?" she said, suddenly catching at his sleeve. "You must tell me. I fancy I know your face: surely I've met you before somewhere?"

"This is the first time I have ever been to a music-hall," he said doggedly.

She drank off her port directly.

"Come—come away at once. Yes, all right—I'm coming with you; so go along."

"But I've only just paid to come in," he said hesitatingly.

"Never mind the paying," and she stamped her little satin foot, "but do as I tell you, and go." And taking his arm, she led him through the doors down to the steps, where the wind blew cold, and the gas jets roared fitfully above.

"Go," she said, pushing him out, "and never come here again; stick to the theatres, you will like them best." And she ran up the steps and was gone.

He rushed after her. The two tall men in uniform stepped before the doors.

"No re-admission, sir," said one, bowing respectfully and touching his cap.

"But that lady," he said, bewildered, and looking from one to the other.

The men laughed, and one of them, shrugging his shoulders, pointed to the box-office.

He turned, and walked down the steps. Was it all a dream? He glanced at his coat. The flower in his buttonhole had gone.